



Wicked Problems - Episode 5: Musician, Writer, and Political Activist, Billy Bragg on The Three Dimensions of Freedom

URL: <https://wickedproblems.fm/billybragg/>

Episode Transcription

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

People, Accountability, Zionism, Brexit, Book, ad hominem attacks, Freedom, Jeremy Corbyn, Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, wicked problems, government, referenda, liberty, economics, The Three Dimensions of Freedom, Billy Bragg, Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back, StoryPositive

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Transcription starts

Toby Corballis. Time code: 0:05

This is the Wicked Problems podcast, a regular look at the world's seemingly intractable problems, problems that appear to defy resolution. You'll hear from practitioners and academics about the ways in which people are trying to solve the most difficult problems, problems that impact businesses, the environment, different social groups, in short problems that could impact any of us at any time. I am Toby Corballis, a change specialist. Throughout my career, I've worked with some of the world's largest organisations on solving some of the most challenging



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problems. I'll be your host on what promises to be a fascinating journey into known, often easy to identify but crucially hard to solve conundrums or, as they're known in academic and professional circles, wicked problems.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 0:59

So, my next guest is known for political activism. He once said in an interview: I don't mind being labelled a political songwriter. The thing that troubles me is being dismissed as a political songwriter. So, he once said Phil Collins might write a song about the homeless, but if he doesn't have the action to go with it, he's just exploiting that for a subject. He bought himself out of the British Army in 1981 for £175, cites his influences as The Clash, Bob Dylan, The Faces, The Small Faces, Simon and Garfunkel, so an eclectic range there and delivered a flagship speech at the Bank of England in 2018. He's recently released a new book entitled The Three Dimensions of Freedom. Welcome, Billy Bragg.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 1:40

Hi, Toby.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 1:41

Nice to have you. Thanks for joining us. Your book, The Three Dimensions of Freedom. I read it recently. I have to say I thought it was a really good book and very easy to read. Yet, you know, it's quite concise, but it covers an awful lot of ground.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 1:55

The focus of my book is really the lack of Accountability that's currently available in our, in our political system, but also in our social media discourse. And as a songwriter, part of the creative process is having your sort of intuitive antenna trying to pick up what's going on and trying to make sense of it. And for a while now, I've been focused on the notion of accountability, and the lack of it in the political discourse. And the examples are everywhere at the moment. I mean, just in this situation we're in with regard to the Brexit vote, and the General Election, and Donald Trump's behaviour towards the impeachment inquiry, let's, let's take Boris



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Johnson's position at the moment. He really wants to get this deal done without any scrutiny, without any accountability. That's why he's tried to put the vote through and then get it done by the end of the month. Now he's in the same sort of position where he's trying to get to have a General Election by the 12th of December. All of this makes much, much less time for scrutiny. So, he's someone who's really not interested in being accountable. He's just recently decided for the third time not to turn up for a commons committee to question him. Again, he's just turned them down and this is unprecedented for a Prime Minister to do this. Because it's a pretty serious thing, the Scrutiny Committee in the House of Commons and Boris Johnson just keeps batting it away. And then you've got Sajid Javid refusing to have a look at the economic ramifications of Brexit and saying oh it's self-evident. I mean, these are these are politicians who are trying to escape not just scrutiny, but much more importantly than that accountability and whilst in the United States of America, where the impeachment inquiry is going on, just the other day, the republican congressman invaded the room to just try and stop it happening because they don't want Donald Trump to be held to account for what's what he's been doing with regard to the foreign countries having some influence on the election. So, I'm looking at this and trying to make sense of what's going on. And in the past, I would have written a song about it. But I think we're so far past that now that I need to do something a little bit more. And that's why I decided to write this book, *The Three Dimensions of Freedom* to make the argument that real freedom is not just about the right to express yourself, the libertarian definition of freedom, but that freedom actually requires equal relevance to be given not only just to Liberty, but also to Equality, the need to listen to other people and to respect the views of other people, but most importantly, to Accountability. That's my that's my argument that freedom actually involves three dimensions: Liberty, Equality and Accountability.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 4:42

And that's accountability through the democratic processes that so you're talking about the accountability or the scrutiny committee, sorry, in the House of Commons, and it's that kind of accountability that people are just ignoring?



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Billy Bragg. Time code: 4:53

Or it's any kind of accountability. I think, you know, because accountability works on a number of different levels. There's a personal accountability where you or I might block someone online, I think that's reasonable to be able to do that in, in social media discourse. There's what you might call social accountability, where society decides that something is not acceptable in public view where you can get held to account for that. There's proprietorial accountability, which would be where, you know, if you're a governor of a pub, and someone comes in every Friday night and starts an argument and a fight, you've got every right to ban that person from your pub, likewise, from your social media platform or from your, you know, debating group or whatever. And then right at the top, you've got sort of State accountability, where there are laws against hate speech, there are laws that prohibit the expressions that are seen to be totally unacceptable. An example of that is that someone was jailed this year in the UK for daubing on the front door of a recently arrived black family, the words, no blacks here. And I think no, nobody, I think would argue that that's infringing that person's right to freedom of speech. It's clearly that's a form of hate speech. So, accountability works on a number of different levels. The key thing is to what I'm trying to do with the book is to flag up that this is what is missing, because this seems to me to be the hole in the donut of the current political debate. And, and this lack of accountability, whether it's in social media discourse, whether it's in our day to day politics, or wherever, crucially, it's in the economy. Because I think neoliberalism - the idea that the market has all the answers - is also a rejection of accountability. All of these things lead to the individual feeling they no longer have some agency over their lives. And I think this is really a real problem. Because when people, when people feel they have agency over their lives, they're willing to work collectively for a common good. Because they can see a way forward they can see there could be a better future for their children if they do X, Y and Zed with other people working together, but when people have no, feel they have no agency over their lives, when they feel that they're living in a rather precarious situation, they're much less willing to work collectively, they're much more concerned about their own particular situation,



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which is understandable. You know, I don't blame people for that. But that lack of agency that feeling that they have no control. globalisation has contributed hugely towards that. And I think it's that sense that our voice is not being heard. I think that's part of the undercurrent of Brexit and of the election of Donald Trump.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 7:30

I think that's a really valid point that people may be voting in ways that we wouldn't expect them to, because they don't feel that they have the agency that they once had over there, or the dominion they need over their own lives. But I sort of kind of remember as well if I go back and it's a dangerous exercise isn't it to try to go back too far in memory, but if I remember back to the 70s and the early 80s, you know, we had, in the late 70s even, there were some pubs that had these awful signs on them that said, you know, no dogs, nobody blacks, no Irish, right? And then we had groups like Rock Against Racism, and CND, and lots of really good causes that seem to sort of ebb away in the meantime. And now all of this sort of really nasty stuff seems to be coming back. And is it because also we've left a bit of a void, where we once had these sort of checks and balances that were social-

Billy Bragg. Time code: 8:24

Well it's interesting you, you mentioned that because I think the, the equivalence of those groups that you mentioned today, which would be to me would be the Me Too movement, Black Lives Matter, Extinction, Rebellion, what they have in common is that they're, they're... All three of those are accountability movements. They're seeking to hold those in power to account for their actions, those in positions of power, and power is not always political power, its economic power, its social power, its power within the relationship. You know, this accountability has to run right throughout society. It's not just a critique of the way politics is. It's a fundamental principle on which we could sort, I hope we can start to build a better society. In the 20th century, if we're going to go back and talk back that far, we kind of had... Well, all of us, most of us had an ideology that we used, whether it was left or right, that we used to discern whether the political situation in front of us was good or bad, how we, how we dealt with that. That's kind of dissipated, now. We



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don't we live in a post ideological world. And what I'm trying to provide with The Three Dimensions of Freedom, I'm trying to give the individual some parameters with which to get an idea of the person that they're dealing with, whether that some arsehole they're arguing with online or Boris Johnson, whether this person is acting in good faith or bad faith. Whether this person when challenged, will respond in a respectful way or, or will immediately start to, you know, attack you in an ad hominem manner. And I'm hoping that these parameters will give people the wherewithal to be able to come to those kind of judgments, because then it's very hard for people to grasp that there's so much information out there. We've kind of lost where we are and that, and that's a big problem. Because if we want to move forward, a map is, is no good to you unless you know exactly where you are on it. It's just a piece of paper if you don't know where you are. So, what I'm trying I'm not I'm not trying to provide the way forward and the answer I'm trying to give people the parameters to work out where to bloody hell they are.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 10:39

And I think that's a great thing. I was really interested, you brought up the ad hominem attack there, right? Because that is the mettle of a lot of people at the moment, isn't it? So, it's the it's the device or modus operandi, whatever you want to call it, but people like Trump, who just seems to call everybody by some kind of derogatory term.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 10:58

Yeah,

Toby Corballis. Time code: 10:58

Left, right, and centre if they don't agree with them. Nigel Farage, I noticed recently was talking about, you know, the sort of dog whistling stuff around George Soros and The Open Society and... How do people pick out those... 'cos some of that is? It's, it's that ad, ad hominem attacks or there's often dressed up with a veneer of respectability. And it can be difficult



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Billy Bragg. Time code: 11:20

Yeah

Toby Corballis. Time code: 11:20

I think for people to cut through that.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 11:22

It changes all the time. And it's up to you to be aware of people's sensitivities. You know, for instance, the term Zionism in the last few years has become a much fought over term from its original meaning, which was someone who supported the idea of the setting up of the State of Israel to be more identified with the policies of Benjamin Netanyahu and the, the current Israeli state. Well, for a lot of people that's meshed over. Zionism and Judaism have become entwined. So, you know, we all of us who happen to be aware of that and be respectful of that. You can't just get one bullet particular political position and stay there forever and think that's okay because this is where I've always been. Things change, particularly when new generations come along. And that's changing all the time. I mean, look at the language around pronouns. When I talk in, in the book about liberty and equality, that's what I'm talking about. It's respecting other people's sensibilities around a word like Zionism, or around the pronouns that they want for themselves, that you can argue with them about, you can debate it with them. You don't have to just say, Okay, that's it, you can, you know, because by you know, by debate, you might find out what they're actually talking about, because it's not always exactly obvious and on why a word has changed its meaning and for, for some people, it takes a bit of time to work out, not what just what's going on, but how to adjust to that. So, it's not about just accepting it. It's, you know, you need inquiry, you need a curiosity around it. But absolutely crucial to that is respect for the person that you're talking to in the position they're coming from even if you don't agree with them. Because I think without equality, liberty is nothing more than privilege. You know, you're just relying on your own position in the debate, in my case, as a, you know, 60 year old white man, and I'm imposing my idea of what Zionism is or what gender is onto a person whose experience is different, and they're trying to explain to me why, why



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it's different. And I'm not I'm not listening to them. I'm not taking it on board. My privileged position is, is trumping their lived experience so that you know, that's why quality is absolutely crucial to this argument because often we're, when we're fighting this particular point, we're fighting against libertarians who believe that freedom means the right to say whatever you want to say whenever you want to say it to whoever you want to say it to with no comeback. That is not freedom. That is Donald Trump's Twitter feed, you know, and if that's the definition of freedom, we're really are in trouble.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 13:55

You make a good point there that's not really freedom of speech is it? That's just you know, giving myself licence to go and bash people.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 14:02

Yeah, it's licence. It's exactly that it's not Liberty, it's licence.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 14:05

Why should they get that licence?

Billy Bragg. Time code: 14:07

Yeah.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 14:08

I suppose. But I think you've written the book about the ancient Greeks and how, you know, you could, you could say whatever you want to whoever you wanted at any point, but you had to be careful, because that might get you lynched.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 14:19

Yes. Well, I'm not I'm not encouraging anybody getting lynched. But I am encouraging people to recognise that they have to be accountable for what they say, and not to, you know, I had a run in with Morrissey a couple of months ago. And, you know, he was like, clutching his pearls and saying, Oh, I'm not allowed to say anything he, you know, making himself into the victim. Don't say you're not



allowed to say shit when you've already said it, mate. You've already said it don't now turn around and tell me not to say

Toby Corballis. Time code: 14:48

Isn't that a mechanism for closing down debate though, as well?

Billy Bragg. Time code: 14:51

Well, I mean, this is this is a really important part of the argument, Toby, this is where the chimera of political correctness comes in. You know, Donald Trump was asked in the 2016 debates on TV about his things he said about women. He answered by saying, not addressing that issue at all.... He just said, what the thing I think there's a real problem with is there's too much political correctness in America. So, he's using the trope of political correctness because political correctness is a trope, it doesn't actually exist. You know, there's no parties out there campaigning for it. There's no people marching on the street demanding it. There's no intellectuals at the University of Chicago writing about it. It's simply a trope, that reactionaries use to police the limits of social change. That's what political correctness is. So, you know, again, it's another way of deflecting, being held to account for your actions. And it has to be revealed for that because when, when someone says to me, that Zionism has a different meaning in the, in the current context, I don't turn around and say, oh, political correctness. I'm not allowed to say Zionism anymore. I have to think try and work out how to work within that within that changed situation because nothing I say is going to change it back again, I'm not, you know, I don't have that power. And the same with people with, with self-determined gender. You know, we all have all of us all the time having to update information, that's the way it should be. That's the way it's always been, you know, it's nothing new in that. But the real, the real problem for me, and why this becomes crucial, is that while Liberty without equality is privileged, Liberty without accountability is the most dangerous type of freedom. And that is impunity. And there are too many people who act with impunity, in our politics, in our social media discourse, in our economy, and in our relationships. And I think that's that that notion of impunity is what underpins so much of the politics, particularly the politics



of the culture war. You know, the cultural war is really about who gets to write the rules - and this is really crucial this - and who gets to break them with impunity. Because that's, you know, cultural war isn't just about, you know, making these rules. It's also about acting a completely hypo- hypocritical way, and Donald Trump is finding some, I mean, probably if it wasn't Trump, I wouldn't really this book wouldn't really connect with people I'd really just be writing about economics. You know, and, and in the book, there is an argument here about neoliberalism. And we can talk about that if you'd like. But what's brought this to the fore is the rise of these paragons of impunity to the top of the political sand pile, Trump in the US and Johnson in the UK. These are men who have lived their entire life without any responsibility for their actions, you know. People complain about and I've seen people write that Jeremy Corbyn is an anti-Semite. That's just not true. You know, he's never, he's never said the kind of racist things that Boris Johnson said about Muslim women. And he's not held to account for that, Johnson. He's never apologised for that. He doesn't even accept it was racism.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 18:03

Talking about his comment about letter boxes and-

Billy Bragg. Time code: 18:05

Letter boxes. Yep. And bank robbers. Yeah. You know, if Jeremy Corbyn had been so personally abusive and, and comments that he's made it led to racist attacks, as we've heard that the evidence shows that Johnson's remarks did, he would be crucified for that, and rightly so. Johnson should be as well, but he's lived his entire life, you know, getting away with it, the most, in my view, the most pernicious thing he ever said was, I am pro having my cake and pro eating it. And in that, you know, in that is the, is the slippery slope towards authoritarianism. Because authoritarianism doesn't begin when people knock on your door in the middle of the night and take away your, your wife or your husband or something. It begins when the regulations are so lacks, that the powerful believe they can act with impunity, and that's where we are with Johnson and that's where we are with Trump.



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Toby Corballis. Time code: 19:00

That's a case i think that Hannah Arendt points out in her book on totalitarianism.
It's almost imperceptible, the beginning of it.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 19:07

It starts with people leaving, but people believing obvious lies, and not, and not caring that, that anyone is held responsible for it. And we're in that we're in that sort of time. You know, one minute, Dominic Cummings is refusing to give evidence to the parliamentary committee on the referendum. And the next thing is, your Wi Fi goes down, but nobody cares about it, because nobody believes that they have to be responsible anymore. You know, whatever, whatever system, you know, your library closes because no one cares about that. Or, you know, there's no school meals for your kids because well, nobody's responsible anymore. This is this is how regimes that are illiberal and undemocratic get by they get by because nobody holds them to account.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 19:50

Yes, you talk, you do talk about neoliberalism and also you talk a lot in the book around, well, not a lot, you talk in the book about you know, people's belief that a free market is like the panacea to all ills. And I found that really interesting because it must be if you if you go over the data, it's something like every seven to eleven years the market crashes and we end up with things like austerity, which is then used as, as a fig leaf in itself for all sorts of bad behaviours really, you know, misdirection, misappropriation of resource.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 20:23

The other thing is that they, they, they don't really make the necessary changes in order to avoid it happening again. I mean, I don't know if you've noticed over the last couple of months, there've been a few key interventions by people in charge of national banking systems to say that there is another crash coming, because the regulations have not been put in place in order to deal with those problems. And the reason for that is because the fundamental belief of the neoliberals is TINA: there is no alternative. And they you know, they refuse to accept that it could be any other



way to run an economy, that there's only one way, and that's the neoliberal way. And, you know, they might have got away with it before. But you know, you only have to look to China to see that there is another way to run the economy. And that's an authoritarian economy. So, you know, there is that I mean, I think there's also in within, in the West, part of the Brexit and the Trump thing is the rise of China is totally freaking people out to get to the situation where people in China will have a better standard of living than people in the United States of America and Europe. And that, that change as well is, is starting to freak people out? I mean, what's it going to be like, if it's, you know, Trump decides he's not going to intervene if you're in the Middle East anymore. So, the Chinese go in to sort it out? You know, are we ready for a world like that? I don't think people have the, yet, have the sort of psychological wherewithal to accept that, you know, the exceptionalism of the US and Europe has gone on for the past century is gonna last forever, because I don't think it is.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 21:56

I mean, declinism is a is a thing, right? All empires throughout history have declined at some point. So, they, you know, they, they atrophy and they, they get replaced by something else and it may not be a good thing that replaces them

Billy Bragg. Time code: 22:11

Often, no, it's not.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 22:14

And, and, you know, you, you talk there about China, and, and you know that being an alternative kind of economic model. And that's not to say I suppose that it's a good alternative, but just that it is an alternative. And we know that there are other alternatives that have been around through history.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 22:30

Yeah, there isn't only one way to run an economy and we've always known that, I mean, you only have to look to Britain in the post war period, you know, between 1945 and 1979, when thanks to government policy, the gap between rich and poor



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narrowed year on year until Margaret Thatcher came in and since then, it's been getting wider every year and continues to since the 2008 crash. I mean, I think, you know, history is going to show 2008 as a near miss not really as a crash, but a near miss and imagine the damage that did... When it really does hit, when the money stops coming out of the wall when you put your credit card in, people really are going to get freaked out. And again, it comes down to the lack of regulation, lack of accountability, lack of a willingness to ensure that the economy works for everyone, because it's my belief... I mean, I've never been a revolutionary socialist. I've always been a democratic socialist. I've never been one of those, sort of tear it all down and build it up differently. The other way, because I've never been quite convinced about what we're going to replace it with. It's always a bit flaky around the edges when people explain it to me, but I believe that essentially, capitalism is like fire. If you tend it and control it, it will give you heat and light. But if you leave it, and let it do whatever it wants to do, it will consume everything in its path. And unfortunately, the neoliberal doctrine encourages capitalism to consume everything in its path. Why we judging our economies by year on year growth? It's clear that that's destroying the planet. We have to come up with some other parameters. So I'm, you know, I'm, I'm really inspired by the school strike, the kids school strike, because they're, you know, they're sort of self-empowered. They're not waiting for anyone to come along and tell them what to do. They're getting it together. They're taking action now. And they're seeking to hold our generation to account and more power to them, I say

Toby Corballis. Time code: 24:20

And again, to your earlier point about ad hominem attacks, what's the reaction?

Well, it's the single out Greta Thunberg and attack her, in what...

Billy Bragg. Time code: 24:28

Of course, because, yeah, because you know, they, they can't reason with what she's talking about. They can't deny the fact that the climate is changing. There's evidence every day, you know, the wildfires in Canada, the islands appearing in the Arctic, even where I live, I live on the coast and it's clear storms are getting



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stronger. There's just more water in the atmosphere. You can't deny that So instead, you have to shoot the messenger. You know, when you strip away what's going on there. It's all about accountability again, and that's why I think as parameters for looking at the society and what's happening. Liberty, Equality and Accountability are very, very good metrics.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 25:07

Absolutely. And I mean, just on that climate thing briefly, yes, accountability, and these, these ad hominem attacks. But I noted not long-ago, Mike Pompeo, he's the US Secretary of State, started to spin it in a positive mode saying Oh, yeah, but the climate change is good, because it could open up economic possibilities, like fishing in the Arctic.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 25:28

Not quite the same if you live in Florida, and most of the land's below sea level.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 25:32

Exactly.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 25:32

And it's, you know, it's slightly problematic. But we're all you know, it calls upon all of us to do to do we can. I mean, I've, I've developed a new way of touring in America, so I'm not flying and playing every day. So I, you know, I stay in a city for a week and do three shows and then drive to the next city. Yeah, and that's a much better way. You know, it's low impact on the environment. It's also low impact on the poor old artists. Because I'm too old to fly and play with down there just destroys my voice. So, on that US tour, you know, you saw me on one of the two flights that I made on that entire three-week tour. And that was one from London to Washington and the other one from New York to London. I haven't quite worked out how to get across the Atlantic yet.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 26:13

Yeah, well, yes.



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Billy Bragg. Time code: 26:16

But the point is the things that I can control the things that I can change, I have changed, and I'm trying to adjust. Again, in the same way that when people hold me to account over the pronouns they prefer, rather than reacting at them and saying, you know, don't be stupid, you're a man or your woman, whatever, I try and take on board what they're telling me and try and grasp the reasoning behind it, and then see if I can adjust my response and my behaviour as best I can. And I think that's the message that's coming out from the school strikes and from Greta Thunberg, is to do you can do the best you can and let's see what we can build on.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 26:51

And as you said earlier, I think, you know, you're listening to those people. You're trying to understand their perspective. That doesn't mean ultimately, that you're going to necessarily agree with that perspective.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 27:00

No.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 27:00

That means you'll be able to take in and understand where they're coming from.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 27:05

The better to talk to them about it and deliberate with them about it, you know. If I can understand where they're coming from, because you know, my experience and their experience is different, we've got to find some common ground in which to discuss this. And, you know, I bring my experience to it, and they bring their experience to it. And we try and work out where we are on these issues. That's what seems to me that's lacking around Brexit at the moment, is any kind of deliberation. Everything is polarised. Everything is black and white. Everything is yes or no, we're really, if anything is going to save us from Brexit, and I'm a Remainer, so I hope we can still be saved. It's going to be nuance, it's not going to be polarisation, it's going to be the nuance of the Irish border. It's going to be the nuance of the Good Friday Agreement. It's going to be the nuance of the 3.1 million



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European citizens who live and work and have made a huge contribution to our country in the last 40 years. It's all about nuance. But that doesn't seem to be reflected in not only in the political debate, but in the way people are voting because during the European elections this summer, the parties that were talking about from a polarised position did well, whereas the parties who were trying to introduce nuance, Labour, and to some extent, Theresa May's Tories got spanked. I found that very disheartening. very disheartening.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 28:21

Yeah. Because it's single issue politics. Right? And, and people are not thinking about the total.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 28:29

Yeah

Toby Corballis. Time code: 28:30

In its totality. I nearly said totalitarianism there, which I'd...

Billy Bragg. Time code: 28:34

Be careful where you're going.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 28:35

Yeah, exactly.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 28:36

But yeah, it's a real problem. And that's why that's why people want a referendum rather than a general election. So, we can focus on, on Brexit and see if we can get, find an agreement around that. I'd very much doubt it though. Frankly. You know, another referendum I think will be another 48/52 split. It might be in my favour, but that won't resolve it. If anything, I'd like to see some consideration given to the idea of a People's Assembly to try and sort it out. So that we can sit down and talk about it over a period and everyone can make sure their views are aired. And then, you know if, even if they recommend a referendum from the People's Assembly, at least it will have come from a place of consensus, rather than a place of division,



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which is where the current programme for another referendum is coming from, I feel.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 29:21

Yeah, I would agree. I think, you know, I have a friend who's he's a, he's passionately Brexit.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 29:28

Yeah

Toby Corballis. Time code: 29:28

He wanted to want to leave. And unlike with most people I've met on both sides, actually, instead of sort of throwing rocks, what he does is he says, well, here's my position, and here's why. And he sets out all these different reasons that he thinks it would be good for the UK to leave European Union. Now, I don't agree with them, but I respect the fact that he's thought about it. And he's come up with his argument and to him it's a cogent argument. And I think that's fine. And I think where we've got lost slightly as people are just shouting at each other that you can't

Billy Bragg. Time code: 29:58

Yeah, it's impossible to have a conversation as a Labour supporter, with people about Labour's position without three people telling me that Jeremy Corbyn is a Brexiteer. You know, obviously it's, it's they're not happy with the way he's responding to it, but they're not taking on board and a number of factors that he has to deal with. His party are split. His MPs are split, and his voters are split, and he has to deal with that reality. So yeah, it's impossible to even set out the, the argument with them because they just like, can't stop kicking the shit at Jeremy Corbyn. It's very disarming,

Toby Corballis. Time code: 30:30

Very disarming. Billy Bragg, that's been really interesting. Thank you ever so much. Your book, the Three Dimensions of Freedom... People want to buy that, they can



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go to your website, and I think they can purchase it from there or from any good bookshop?

Billy Bragg. Time code: 30:44

Yep, it's not a big book. It's only, it's a pamphlet, really. It's only about 1,700 words. And it's about, I think it's the same price as a copy of *Mojo*. It's a kind of afternoon read on, on a wet October afternoon, or November afternoon. You sit down and, yeah, wade through that. There's some jokes in it. It's not all po-faced politics,

Toby Corballis. Time code: 31:04

No, and, but it does cover a lot of ground and I think it's, I think that's really, you know, it's powerful in that in that, you know, small number of words to cover the ground that you've covered. I think it was really really impressive. Before we go perhaps it's worth just letting people know because this is going to go out very soon and so this will be current still, but you've got a tour coming up: *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 31:26

I do that's right. It's these three these three night shows I've been talking about. The first night, I play my current touring set, which is like, you know, a career spanning set. The second night, I play songs, only songs from my first three albums, a selection, you know, not the whole album, just a selection from that period. And then the last night, the third night, I only play songs from my second three albums. So it's *Workers Play Time*, *Don't Try This At Home* and *William Bloke*, and it's been going really well. I've been doing it in the US. I did a couple of shows earlier this year, one in Bristol and another one in Dublin, and it's a lot of fun because I get to wake up in the same bed five days in a row. I can't tell you when you're on the road that's almost like being on holiday, that. So yeah, so I'm starting in Glasgow and then I've got Sheffield, Manchester, London, Cambridge and Birmingham,



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Toby Corballis. Time code: 32:12

But one up the road from me. So I think I will try and get to that, it's in Islington. And also, in, I think coming up next year, in Australia, so you've got Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. And then

Billy Bragg. Time code: 32:24

Same kind of thing. Yeah,

Toby Corballis. Time code: 32:25

Yeah. And then New Zealand. So, Christchurch...

Billy Bragg. Time code: 32:28

You might as well while you're there, eh, do New Zealand as well. It's just around the corner.

Toby Corballis. Time code: 32:31

It is just over the pond, as it were. So yeah, so well. Good luck with that. Thank you once again for doing the show. And it's been a pleasure.

Billy Bragg. Time code: 32:38

Good to talk to you, Toby. Thanks, mate.